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China's Soft Power: Challenges of Confucianism and Confucius Institutes

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Abstract

China's government considers soft power an important element in cultivating a better image of China. This article examines how recently revived Confucianism and Confucius Institutes serve as tools of the Chinese government's soft power and foreign policy goals. The aim is to highlight some of the major challenges for China's soft power, particularly within politically driven Confucianism and Confucian Institutes. The question is to what extent Confucianism and Confucius Institutes are intertwined with traditional Chinese culture as part of China's soft power "to win minds and hearts" in China's global reach, thus helping China to reach its foreign policy goals. The answer to this question is grounded in the theoretical framework. The central concept is soft power driven from international relations theory. Management and organization theories are applied to analyse the performance of the case study institute in Finland whereas critical theory combines the input and the outcome to demonstrate the challenges for Confucius Institutes. The chosen methodology is the qualitative method with a single case study to demonstrate that China's soft power, culture, values and policies face huge challenges to becoming attractive. The conclusion is that government driven Confucianism and Confucius Institutes seem not to be as powerful ingredients in soft power as the Chinese Communist Party intended.

Keywords: China; soft power; Confucianism; Confucius Institutes

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Introduction

The international relations have broadened and the realist worldview has anticipated many of the developments in this era of globalization. In *Power and Interdependence*, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977) explain the mechanics of driving power politics and its changing nature. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington (1996, p. 229) argues that culture, rather than ideology or geopolitics, would be the driving source of international conflict in a new world order.

Diplomacy and economic relations play an important role in China's foreign policy. The Chinese government exports the so-called "Beijing consensus", referring to China's model of fast economic development in contrast to the Washington Consensus with its neo-liberal economic principles. Today, China's government considers soft power as an important element in cultivating a better image of China, not only to nations, but also regions, organizations and individuals. The Chinese government has augmented Chinese culture as a vital element in international competition to attract other countries. Hence, the recent revival of Confucianism and rapidly built Confucius Institutes all over the world are recognized as a part of China's soft power and foreign policy.

This article examines how recently revived Confucianism and Confucius Institutes serve as tools of Chinese government's soft power and foreign policy goals. The aim is to highlight some of the major challenges for China's soft power, particularly within politically driven Confucianism and Confucian Institutes. The question is to what extent Confucianism and Confucius Institutes are intertwined with traditional Chinese culture as part of China's soft power "to win minds and hearts" in China's global reach, thus helping China to reach its foreign policy goals. The answer to this question is grounded in the theoretical framework. The central concept is soft power driven from international relations theory. Management and organization theories are applied to analyse the performance of the case study institute in Finland, whereas critical theory combines the input and the outcome to demonstrate the challenges for Confucius Institutes. The chosen methodology is the qualitative method (Silverman, 2005), with a single case study (Yin, 2003) used to answer the proposed question. Research data includes Chinese and non-Chinese literature, the Confucius Institute's official and internal documents, Confucius Institute magazines and Confucius Institute web pages. Data is analysed through discourse

analysis and interpreted for explanation. In addition, the empirical data gathered while I worked as a director of the Confucius Institute at the University of Helsinki in Finland from 1 January 2012 to 31 August 2014 provides a deep insight into Confucius Institutes, not only the institute where I was working, but also other Confucius Institutes which are dealing with similar issues and problems as well what I was facing. “My” institute serves as a case study in this paper. Being the director of the Confucius Institute, I had an opportunity to meet hundreds of people in various meetings and conferences in China and elsewhere. I made observations and had discussions with numerous Chinese and non-Chinese directors and teachers of Confucius Institutes, administrators from the Confucius Institute Headquarters (<http://www.hanban.org>) and Chinese universities, and from Chinese embassies. At the Confucius Institute conferences, the Confucius Institute directors discussed important topics usually in groups of 8–12 people. More importantly, these official group discussions stimulated unofficial, confidential discussions in smaller groups and between individuals concerning the organization and management of our Confucius Institutes while we shared our experiences and worries in our work. In addition, many discussions were also observed unobtrusively to avoid the participants being aware of it. All this has played a supportive role in facilitating the understanding of the case study institute (Stake, 1995) and thus identifying and critically reflecting on the reasons behind struggles in the institute.

I have sought scholarly objectivity within this article as a Sinologist enriched with a management degree and considerable experience working in multicultural environments. Meanwhile I acknowledge that objectivity is always bound to the researcher’s own attitudes, values and experiences, being both an asset and a limitation. As the constructivist paradigm claims, the truth is relative and it is dependent on one’s own perspective (Klein, 2012, p. 71).

This article is an attempt to broaden the view on China’s soft power and highlight the challenges it faces in the international arena. My aim is to provide more knowledge about Chinese soft power attached to cultural features and to delve into its challenges in building a more favourable image of China. In the following, first I take a brief look at China’s foreign policy and the characteristics of China’s soft power. Then, the role of Chinese culture is highlighted by an inquiry into the revival of Confucianism and the setting up of Confucius Institutes. An analysis of the case study organization follows. In conclusion, I discuss what the major challenges of Chinese soft power are and how to overcome them.

China's Foreign Policy

Over 2,000 years, the Chinese approach to foreign relations was dominated by the distinction of a Chinese “us” and non-Chinese “others”. China-centric universalism was based on the Chinese emperor as the Son of Heaven, who had a mandate from Heaven to rule all-under-Heaven (*tianxia*). Confucianism and the Mandate of Heaven were the foundations for the tributary system that shaped foreign policy and trade in Imperial China, playing a major role in the history of neighbouring East Asian “barbarian” tribes and kingdoms which, wanting to trade with China, sent their envoys to pay tribute by *kow-tow* before the emperor. This ritual legitimized China's superiority and suzerainty. As Chen (2005, p. 37) says, the relationship with the “barbarians” meant that they had to accept the universal Chinese culture through China's moral example — though China occasionally employed force.

China's grand strategy has three objectives: first, preserve domestic order and well-being, second, defend against external threats to national sovereignty and territory, and third, attain and maintain geopolitical influence (Swaine & Tellis, 2000). China's foreign policy is derived from the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These principles were originally enumerated in 1954, when China was seeking to extend relations with all non-socialist Third World countries. The core idea behind the Five Principles is sovereignty — meaning that one state has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of another state (Nathan & Ross, 1997). It consists of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference (most notably Taiwan and Tibet), equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. From the 1978 reforms, China concentrated on economic development and thus Deng Xiaoping laid a peaceful foreign policy strategy to “hide its strength and bide its time” (*taoguang yanghui*). The “New Security Concept” adhering to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was unveiled in 1997. It marked the new proactive Chinese approach to international affairs through the establishment of bilateral “strategic partnerships”. China often characterizes its foreign policy and national security goals in terms of principles and slogans. Since the 1980s, under Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese government has said it pursues an “independent foreign policy and peace” under which China's fundamental foreign policy goals are: to preserve China's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to create a favour-

able international environment for China's reform, opening up and modernization. The "Harmonious World" was first publicly introduced in 2005 to demonstrate China's commitment to global peace and stability ("Harmonious World," 2007). In January 2014, the Chinese Communist Party General Secretary, Xi Jinping, announced that China should be "proactive" (*fenfa you wei*).

China's economic model requires new markets and privileged access to resources, and this is a moderating factor in its foreign policy approach. China has placed particular emphasis on the development of "good-neighbourly" relations and "partnership", non-military aspects adopting the approach of setting aside areas of disagreement, focusing on confidence-building measures to promote ties and engaging in economic integration and multilateral co-operation to address shared concerns (Bergsten, Freeman, Lardy, & Mitchell, 2008).

However, the outcome of the *Global Attitudes and Trends* survey (PewResearchCenter, 2013) was that although many see China as becoming the world's leading power, America's global image remains more positive than China's. American soft power advocates the universal values of democracy and human rights while China's soft power promotes traditional Chinese culture.

China's Soft Power

Today, China is the second largest economy in the world and for that reason it is seeking greater influence in the world, while global politics has become multi-polar and multi-cultural, and in consequence the nature of power is changing. China, as other nations, has always understood the importance of building a positive image abroad. American journalist Edgar Snow was reporting on China's civil war and he was the first Westerner to meet and interview the Communist leaders. His book, *Red Star Over China* (1937; Gollancz, 1968), was a worldwide success. It won sympathetic attention from the Western powers. China Radio International (Radio Beijing) was established in 1941 to broadcast its programmes in all languages all over the world (The China Radio International Media Essay, 2015), as did the Voice of America and BBC World Service. Over the decades, China projected images presenting itself as a peace-loving socialist country and a victim of foreign aggression. In 1960, hundreds of thousands of young Westerners marched behind portraits of Mao, waving the "Little

Red Book". In the early 1970s, the so-called "ping-pong" diplomacy and pandas started to pave the way for a more outward-looking China. With the beginning of the "open and reform" policy in the 1980s, China's diplomacy adopted a "pragmatic" approach. Deng Xiaoping's China needed domestic economic reforms and engagement with the world. His famous slogan, "it doesn't matter if the cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice", attracted foreign investors, and foreign investments in China surged. Consequently, *Time* magazine named Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping as its 1978 "Man of the Year". He won the title again in 1985. Today, China Radio International (CRI) airs radio programmes daily via shortwave radio, satellite and the internet in English and in 40 foreign languages, in addition to standard Chinese and four Chinese dialects. It has also opened 12 Confucius Classrooms worldwide to promote Chinese language learning and Chinese culture.

Harvard University professor Joseph Nye (1990) coined the term "soft power". He defines soft power as the capability of a nation to achieve desired objectives through diplomatic persuasion or attraction without using hard or coercive power such as military action. Nye's concept of soft power was soon introduced in China. Since then, Chinese scholars, journalists and government analysts have analysed his concept of soft power. Chinese perspectives on soft power are quite similar to Nye's, but there are also different views on it (Lai, 2012b). Some scholars (Zheng & Zhang, 2012, p. 21) claim that Nye's conceptual division between soft power and hard power is too simple and that some of Nye's arguments are not in accordance with the reality of international politics. What that means is not explained. Nor does the claim of "not being scientific enough" (often used Chinese rhetoric) hold any relevance, as in their view Nye's listings, such as American popular culture, films, TV programmes, Europe's Nobel Prizes and overseas development assistance, "do not have important implications for international politics or state behavior" because "sovereign states are still the major players in international relations, and national interests are the most important factor they consider when formulating foreign policy" (Zheng & Zhang, 2012, pp. 25–26). Some researchers also propose that "whether a power resource is soft or hard depends on the perceptions and *feelings* of various actors in specific situations" (Zheng & Zhang, 2012, pp. 21, 27).

In the Chinese view, many Westerners' biases toward China result from their lack of understanding of the essence of the Chinese culture (Lai, 2012a, p. 85). "It's high time to make ourselves better understood by the

world's people", says Professor Du Ruiqing, former president of the Xi'an International Studies University. In his view, culture is a soft power that reduces the misunderstanding and hostilities between the people of different races. Also, "Once they come to know the Chinese people better, they would find out that harmony is an essential part of the Chinese tradition and a country that highly values harmony will absolutely pose no threat to the rest of the world". And therefore "China should help people in other nations acquaint themselves with the Chinese culture, its traditions, religions and particularly the Chinese way of thinking" ("China Promotes," 2006). Culture as the core of soft power was first expressed by Fudan University Professor Wang Huning. In his article "Culture as National Soft Power" (1993), Wang says that Chinese culture is the main source of a state's soft power: "if a country has an admirable culture and ideological system, other countries will tend to follow it ... It does not have to use its hard power which is expensive and less efficient". Thus, he developed the concept that can be termed "the soft power with Chinese characteristics".

At the 16th CPC Congress in 2002, in his report "Build a Well-off Society in an All-round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (Jiang, 2002), Jiang Zemin launched China's cultural system reform (CSR). In May 2004, the concept of soft power was exposed in the 13th Group Study Session of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Two articles were published in the official weekly magazine *Outlook* (*Liaowang*). The first article discussed the Chinese model and the Beijing Consensus and the second one made the point that China's soft power comprising culture and ideology was becoming increasingly important. Then Premier Wen encouraged gaining international recognition and respect, utilizing the quintessence of its traditional culture with its emphasis on harmony (Lai, 2012a, p. 85). In 2006, President Hu Jintao, in the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group Meeting, also called for increasing the nation's international status and influence through its culture (Li, 2008; Ma, 2008). In July 2007, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Committee held a special session on cultural construction as the main approach for national soft power to meet domestic demands and enhance China's competitiveness in the international arena (Li, 2008). In 2010, the Party decided to deepen the reform of cultural institutions in order to enhance China's cultural soft power. In consequence, the Central Committee of the CCP called for a greater development of culture and an increase in national

soft power through traditional culture, exports of cultural products and external media initiatives (Zheng & Zhang, 2012, p. 22). Thus, China's soft power promoting traditional Chinese culture and its values have become a part of foreign politics while culture is frequently referred to by Chinese leaders in order to enhance China's competitiveness in the international arena (Liu & Wang, 2007).

In the globalized world, soft power has become increasingly important. The Chinese government has increased its soft power using diplomacy serving ideological and political ends, and economic and cultural tools. Personal diplomacy is a hallmark in building relations. China's diplomacy is to "reveal the high level of trust" through personal diplomacy at the elite level, visits and seminars to expand people-to-people exchanges, scholarships and increased contacts, particularly with less developed countries, and recently increasingly with Africa (Yu, 2009, pp. 10, 11, 18). Economic ties to developing countries have come to be at the forefront of relations. The major change from aid to trade and investments was the result of China's need for oil and mineral resources to support China's economic growth. The Ministry of Education authorized guidelines in March 2004 to strengthen instruction in China's "outstanding traditional culture", and the party propaganda department has said traditional values are part of "socialist core values".¹ Thus, Chinese traditional culture has a major role to play in winning hearts and minds while political values and economic attraction are considered essential components of national strength (Kurlantzick, 2008, p. 167).

Confucianism

*Seeing mountains' climbing and rivers' curving,
I could see no way ahead,
Suddenly in the shade of the willows and amidst shining flowers,
A village appeared.*

This Song dynasty poem is a metaphor of Confucianism that from time to time has been criticized, encouraged and now supported. Throughout the

1 Retrieved on 5 April 2015 from <http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s7061/201404/166543.html> (in Chinese).

20th century, Confucianism was criticized as “feudal” by China’s Communist leaders. In anti-Confucian campaigns, ranging from the 1912 New Culture Movement to the 1973 “Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius” campaign during the Cultural Revolution, Confucianism was seen as a hindrance to spreading the Communists’ agenda. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping initiated the policy of opening up. Along with the process of liberalization, temples and monasteries were also opened and scholars were permitted to study Confucianism as a philosophical system. Confucianism, earlier seen as a feudal ideology, was now legitimated as a part of traditional Chinese culture. The process of loosening the restrictions continued and freedom of religious belief was adopted in a new constitution in 1982. Today, the five religions, Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestant Christianity and Catholicism, have a legal standing in China, whereas Confucianism is not regarded as a religion.

Confucius (551–479 BC) was a thinker, political figure and educator. Fung Yu-lan (1983), one of the great 20th century authorities on the history of Chinese thought, compares Confucius’ influence in Chinese history with that of Socrates in the West. Confucianism and its values have played a role in Chinese thinking for 2,000 years. His teachings in the *Lunyu* or *Analects* formed a school of ethics emphasizing the proper order of social relationships within the family and society. Confucian values of filial piety (*xiao*), humanity (*ren*) and ritual (*li*) are taught in the *Four Books*. Filial piety, which is connected with ancestor worship, is the root of humanity. Every human being has the capacity to possess *ren*, also interpreted as “goodness”, “benevolence” and “love”. *Li*, respect for ritual, is interpreted as the proper way of doing things. Confucius advocated moral education in his teachings. His teachings in the *Lunyu* form the foundation of *junzi* — the educated man, and how such an individual should live his life and interact with others, and the forms of society and government in which he should participate. Thousands of years ago, the character “*he*”, which means harmony and peace, was already carved on tortoise shells. Then, Confucius presented the idea of harmony and a harmonious society (*hexie shehui*), meaning a world full of differences and contradictions where the righteous man balances in order to achieve harmony.

The core of Confucian teachings is *ren* — the noblest human virtue: being respectful, generous, honest, diligent and kind. The relevance of Confucianism is the spirit of humanism, as in many other cultures and civilizations. This human-centred philosophy can be found in ancient Indian philosophies, in the explanations of pre-Socratic Greek philosophers and

later in Plato's discussions about wisdom, courage, temperance and justice, and in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his other writings. One example is the ethic of reciprocity — called the Golden Rule in Christianity. In Confucianism, Chinese reciprocity ethics puts one person in the other's place. "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you" (*Lunyu* 15:23). There is the analogy with the Christian Golden Rule in the words of Jesus, "Do not do to others what you do not like for yourself", according to Matthew (7:12), Luke (6:31) and Tobias (4.15) (Lippiello, 2014, pp. 2085–2086).

In *The Analects of Confucius with Illustrations* (2011), Confucius' political doctrine is interpreted as "our Master's teachings are centred on nothing but loyalty and forbearance" — Loyalty: Help others gain what they themselves want to gain and help others achieve what they themselves want to achieve; Forbearance: Don't impose on others things you don't want. *The Book of Rites* advanced the *xiaokang* (comfortably off) society and the *datong* world (a world of perfection) in which all members of the society work for the benefit of the general public. The basics for building an ideal society is respect for the Zhou emperor and his authority. It is known that the primary cause of social upheavals during the Spring and Autumn Period (771–476 BCE) was that the Zhou emperor had lost control over state power. Therefore, to achieve the reunification of the country, people had to honour the Zhou emperor. As Kong (2011, pp. 67–68) says, "Confucius' ideas about the unification of the country contributed a great deal to the consolidation of the Chinese nation". All these have inspired the Chinese government and, indeed, Confucianism and the Confucian classics have experienced a revival. Today's Confucianism in China includes scholars working to promote the Confucian tradition and, as Bell (2008, pp. 188–189) points out, "to educate a community of friends and scholars in the Confucian classics and to plant the seeds of political Confucianism". In the autumn of 2006, Yu Dan, a professor of media studies at Beijing Normal University and a member of the Chinese Communist Party, gave a series of lectures entitled "Yu Dan's Insights into the Analects", which was broadcast by China Central Television. An edited transcript of the lectures was published in book form. The following year the book had sold some 10 million copies in China, still remaining at the top of the Chinese bestseller lists today. The "Harmonious Socialist Society", as a part of Hu Jintao's Scientific Development concept, serves the government's goal of building up the *xiaokang* society, meaning a "well-off" society in which the people are able to live relatively comforta-

bly, by 2020. The White Paper on peaceful development issued by the Chinese government describes “harmony as the building of a peaceful and prosperous world as the ultimate goal of China’s development”. Already in September 2005, at the 60th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, President Hu Jintao called for multilateralism, mutually beneficial co-operation and the spirit of inclusiveness in building a harmonious world (“Hu Calls for a Harmonious World,” 2005; Hu, 2005). Further, as an invited guest, I had a chance to witness how Confucianism and a harmonious world was boosted by President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall, Beijing on 24 September 2014 at the opening ceremony of the International Conference in Commemorating the 2565th Anniversary of Confucius and the 5th Congress of the International Confucian Association. At the opening ceremony, President Xi gave an exceptionally long speech. He emphasized culture as the soul of thinking and a source of learning while he elaborated on a harmonious world and Confucianism in the international community. He also said that culture is for inspiration, to make people happy, so anyone who governs must seek truth from the facts and spread benefits equally and it will develop to be relevant; some parts of the old [culture] are outdated and new practices and new culture should integrate the old and the new. Xi uses classical Chinese allusions in his public statements. These have been published in the *People’s Daily*, the party’s flagship newspaper. In “Xi Jinping Uses the Classics” (“Xi Jinping,” 2014), he cites 135 examples on topics from law to self-cultivation, drawn mainly from works associated with the ancient sage Confucius.

“He who rules by virtue is like the North Star”, Xi said at a meeting of officials in 2014, quoting Confucius. “It maintains its place, and the multitude of stars pay homage.” In the same speech, in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, where leaders hold congresses and legislative sessions, Xi stated that the ancient tradition “can offer beneficial insights for governance and wise rule” (Xi, 2014).

What is the relevance of Confucianism in today’s China? It has at least three purposes in the context of governance. First, it serves as an inspiration for government to secure social and political harmony, as doctrines of Confucianism can be interpreted by the government to fulfil the needs of today. For example, a new norm of *zhong* that demands loyalty from the subject to the sovereign has emerged under the sovereign–subject relationship of *zhong* (loyalty) and *xiao* (filial piety), binding those not connected by blood (Kong, 2011, p. 88). Second, Confucianism also serves the govern-

ment by “humanizing” contemporary society where the traditional social fabric has become fragmented, families are disintegrating, crime is soaring and the polluted environment is killing people. Confucianism reminds people about kindness and compassion in society. Thus, it helps the government, which is faced by deepening inequality in wealth and a rapidly ageing society and the challenge of how to provide public services for citizens as the traditional family network has fallen apart, due to migration and because of the one-child policy. And third, although Communism with Chinese characteristics remains an ideology, Confucianism has been able to restore China’s prestige and unify the nation to work toward realizing the China Dream and thus to legitimize the Communist Party.

Confucius Institutes

China established the first Confucian Institute in November 2004 in Seoul, South Korea, a few months after establishing a pilot institute in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Since the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), Confucianism has been spreading overseas and the Korean peninsula was Confucianism’s first destination around the turn of the 2nd century BC. As Starr (2009) says, the choice of the first location of the Confucius Institute was a message to the world that China is back as *Zhongguo* (the central state).

By the end of 2013, 440 Confucius Institutes and 646 Confucius Classrooms had been established in 120 countries and regions around the world. The total global expenditure of Confucius Institutes was US\$278,371 (Annual Report of Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2013). A newly established Confucius Institute receives a fixed amount of funds for its initial operation. Thereafter, funding for its annual projects is raised by the Chinese Headquarters and the foreign organizer in generally in a 1:1 ratio.

According to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes,² the Institutes are devoted to deepening friendly relationships with other nations, promoting the development of multi-culturalism and constructing a harmonious world. The Confucius Institutes are linked to China’s global engagement and internationalization as the platform for collaboration and exchange projecting China’s soft power. The institutes are a “place for foreigners to learn Chinese language and culture as well

2 Retrieved on 8 August 2014 from http://english.hanban.org/node_7880.htm

as understand modern China". The Confucius Institutes have also become a part of the China Dream and thus are fully supported by the Chinese government. As Madam Liu Yandong assured in her keynote speech at the opening session of the 8th Confucius Institute Conference on 7 December 2013: "The Confucius Institute, as an effective vehicle for cultural exchanges and important platform for reinforcing international friendships, is where the China Dream, the dreams of all countries and the world dream come to convergence."³

Undoubtedly, the Confucius Institutes are under a high level of control by the state. The Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) is an executive body affiliated to China's Ministry of Education. The Council is composed of members from 12 state ministries and commissions, namely the General Office of the State Council, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Culture, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (China Radio International), the State Press and Publications Administration, the State Council Information Office (also known as the Office of Overseas Propaganda) and the State Language Work Committee. The duties of the Council include formulating and amending the Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes, examining and approving the development strategies and plans of global Confucius Institutes, examining and approving annual reports and working plans of the Headquarters and discussing issues of significance concerning the development of the Confucius Institutes.

The Confucius Institutes at the host universities claim to offer a selective view of China and this is also shown Confucius Institute Headquarters' blueprint for the introduction of a New Sinology. The Confucius Institute Headquarters launched the pilot project "Confucius China Studies Programme" in 2012. Currently, it includes 100 research topics in eight categories, and it offers China Fellowships, "Understanding China" Fellowships, and Young Leaders Fellowships, as well as funding for international conferences and publications. The Confucius Institutes are asked to recommend excellent students, friends or colleagues to apply for the pro-

3 Liu Yandong, Vice Premier of the State Council of China, Chairperson of the Council of Confucius Institute Headquarters, keynote speech at the Opening Session of the 8th Confucius Institute Conference, 7 December 2013.

gramme. No doubt, this Hanban-driven new Sinology has no China “sensitive” issues.

Chinese state media have defended the spread of Confucius Institutes worldwide and argued against criticism of one of China’s most visible soft power initiatives. Answering criticism that the institutes are essentially self-managed bubbles within their host institutions, within which the Chinese government’s censorship norms apply, Xinhua News Agency said that the institutes have management committees that include local university staff members. Xinhua News Agency’s editorial also said the institutes were akin to programmes like the British Council or L’Alliance Française. It did not address the association’s point that those organizations, unlike the Confucius Institutes, are not located on university campuses (Bree, 2014).

The rapid expansion of the Confucius Institutes has raised concerns regarding their goals and political influence internationally. Organized opposition to the establishment of a Confucius Institute has been demonstrated at the University of Melbourne, the University of Manitoba, Stockholm University and the University of Chicago. In his article “China U”, Marshall Sahlins (2013) claimed that universities hosting Confucius Institutes have become engaged in the political propaganda and efforts of a foreign government. He urged prominent universities hosting Confucius Institutes to take a lead in change the course to ensure academic freedom and the universal ideal of free inquiry. In June 2014, the American Association of University Professors issued a statement urging American universities to cease their collaboration with Confucius Institutes. Then, in November 2014, the University of Chicago decided not to extend its agreement for the Confucius Institute (Tatlow, 2014). The Confucius Institute at Stockholm University will close in June 2015. This decision was influenced by the Braga incident in summer 2014 when Confucius Institute officers from China tried to censor the European Association of Chinese Studies conference programme. It remains to be seen how these cases will affect other major universities hosting the Confucius Institutes and regarding their undue influence.

Moreover, there are different views and opinions about the role and impact of Confucius Institutes in their host organizations. Certainly conflicts in organizations are inevitable everywhere. Albeit the message of the Chinese government is to promote Confucianism to build a harmonious world, behind the scenes there are often conflicts, disputes and problems in these institutes. Here the purpose is to highlight one of the Confucius Institutes as a case study institute to analyse the reasons for all kinds of problems

damaging to teamwork and the overall development of the institute. The aim is to demonstrate that politics plays a part in the institute.

The case study Confucius Institute was established in 2007. The initiative to establish a Confucius Institute at the University of Helsinki came through the Ministry of Education of Finland after the visit of China's Premier Wen Jiabao to Finland in 2006. The institute is a joint initiative of the University of Helsinki and Hanban, and Renmin University was appointed as an academic partner university. The case study analysis comprises two parts. The first part includes the McKinsey 7S Framework taken from management and organization studies employed to examine the organizational aspects, and understand what aspects in the organization are causing problems and thus should be addressed (Argyris, 1970; Harrison, 2004). The second part challenges the organization studies perspective toward reflexive approaches and therefore critical theory, and a postmodern approach is applied to investigate more sensitive "depth structures" carrying hidden meanings (Martin, 1995) to provide enriched conceptions of political power demonstrating the representation of diverse interests embedded in conflict.

The 7S Framework model is based on the theory that for an organization to perform well, seven factors, namely Strategy, Structure, Systems, Style, Staff, Skills and Shared Values, need to be aligned and mutually reinforcing. In the 7S Framework analysis of the institute, these factors were assessed and the results were as follows.

Strategy

There is no real, mutually agreed strategy among the partners. According to the agreement, the Confucius Institute uses resources from both Hanban and the host university for Chinese language teaching and culture promotion, and for research on China. The research on China was re-emphasized in the Confucius Institute's development plan in 2012, in line within the goals and framework of the host university, which is one of the world's leading multi-disciplinary research universities. It appeared that no real support was available from China, for academic co-operation or (real) academic research on China. It was also hard to initiate any changes to improve Chinese language teaching methods or new approaches in teachers' development. Also attempts to showcase contemporary Chinese culture at the institute were strongly opposed. The problem is the China-driven approach

that seeks to dominate the institute, as the “Chinese side” aims to construct a local “little China” to execute China’s Hanban agenda at the Confucius Institute. No doubt, the internationalization process is quite new for China, and therefore “Go global, Act local” is not really adopted. For example, although Hanban declares in its rules that Confucius Institutes respect local cultural and educational traditions and social customs, in reality the interpretation of the rules is reserved in Hanban’s Constitution and By Laws (Chapter 8:39). Political guidance is culminating in attempts to limit academic freedom through the Chinese director.

Structure

The partnership structure is complex, with three different players of the Confucius Institute, Hanban and the Chinese University (as an academic partner). The Confucius Institute is managed by the local director with the “assistance” of the Chinese director under the board, which includes three members both from the host university and the Chinese partner university. The chair is from the host university, one of the Confucius Institute board members. Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters supervises the institute, and selects the Chinese director and teachers from the pool appointed by the Chinese partner university. Hanban also nominates the Chinese university that acts as an academic partner, pays it an annual fee for pre-selection of the Chinese director and teachers from its staff, and for them to be sent on Hanban’s training course before their dispatch to the Confucius Institutes all over the world. Communication between different structures and different players culminates in endless “misunderstandings” and, in consequence, a waste of time and resources to fix them. Often the Chinese two directors system does not work. The reasons vary between cultural and personal differences, but I argue that the financing system and Hanban’s training for the job play a big role in that Chinese ownership in the institute is very strong. It is worth noting that the salary of the Chinese director and teachers is paid by Hanban. Furthermore, the Chinese director and teachers are certain to obey the instructions of the Chinese government. According to the *Manual for Chinese Directors* (2011.09), the main responsibilities of the Chinese director is implementing policies and measures formulated by the Headquarters as well as supporting foreign counterpart directors in the administration of Confucius Institutes, to

love the motherland and be faithful to the cause of international Chinese language education, implement diplomatic policies adopted by Chinese government, conform to the administration of the Headquarters, observe honesty and integrity, and conscientiously boycott and oppose any words and deeds that harm the friendly relations between China and other countries.

Systems

The Confucius Institute is responsible for drawing up and managing its own budget and financial statement. Yet there are two systems: the Chinese and the local (part of the host university's system). Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters provides guidelines and contributes financially: start-up money and annual funding based on a budget approved by the Confucius Institute Headquarters. The host university provides facilities and pays the salaries of local staff. Activities and procedures of the institute are engaged by the partnership structure. The process of operating with two systems which are not compatible is complicated and time consuming. In addition, the Chinese systems are mostly communicated in Chinese language, and thus necessitate the assistance of the Chinese director, whose skills, ability and willingness to "assist" the local director and staff are then essential.

Style

Style is about culture, informed and uninformed rules. Along with the different systems, different working styles prevail — Chinese and local. Cultural values may not converge in the workplace. The Chinese working culture is hierarchical and quite opposite to the egalitarian style prevailing in the host country. This shows in communication style, how to address each other, what and how to report and to whom, what yes means, how to say no, and what is regarded more important — a focus on quantity (Chinese style) or on quality (host's style). Indeed, the workplace with individuals from different cultures is a particularly fertile ground for miscommunication and misunderstandings. This was seen in how the rules and deadlines were interpreted and applied. Frequently discussed cultural dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism,

power distance, and uncertainty avoidance were all omnipresent while misleading stereotype views and prejudices were detected. Neither all Chinese are hard-working and group players, nor are all Finns straightforward and honest. Generally people expect themselves and others to be more direct in the way they communicate, or “say it as it is” (Holtgraves, 1997). Thus, avoiding misunderstanding requires communicators to have a similar focus on relational concerns.

Staff

Staff are the people working in the institute, Chinese and non-Chinese, with their different capacities. Their competencies are crucial to the development of the institute. Local staff consist of the director of the Confucius Institute and a co-ordinator. Chinese staff include the Chinese director, one teacher and one volunteer teacher. In addition, the institute has responsibility for five volunteer teachers working in other places. The host university hires the director and other staff. China sends the Chinese director, teachers and volunteer teachers. In the absence of a common strategy and integrated, properly working systems, the challenge for the team working with “given” staff, people from different cultures, ambitions and capabilities, is huge, as we discovered.

Skills

Skills means skills obtained through education, individual working skills, and how we work together. Working skills are critical, and communicating ideas, diverse viewpoints and sharing thoughts is essential to formulate common goals. The Finnish director and staff are recruited by the host university through an open call and recruitment process. Hanban sends the Chinese directors to “assist” the local director and Chinese teachers to teach Chinese language and culture. As the number of Confucius Institutes has increased rapidly, there is a shortage of teachers to be sent abroad. Instead, more volunteer teachers are sent, mainly young graduates who mostly are bright and enthusiastic, but have no experience in teaching. Qualified Chinese teachers in the institute were not familiar with local teaching methods and modern techniques. The people’s skills do not always fit the job requirements. Moreover, sometimes individual’s *guanxi* (personal

relations) override their skills and ability for the job, as in the case of an acting Chinese director who had neither management skills nor experience required for the job. The consequences were serious, distrust and suspicion prevailed and thus no sense of support or trust for each other could really develop among the team members.

Shared Values

Shared values are central to the development of all the other critical elements. The findings of the analysis show that there are no omnipresent shared values to guide the institutes. The weakness in the institute's strategy, structure, systems, style, staff and skills show that changes in those are needed. As people did not share the same values and goals, they were not committed to their work, or to develop their skills and competencies to respond to local needs. Rather, the institute served to satisfy their personal desires, to experience a "new culture" in beautiful Finland; moreover, it was the place to travel from to all the other countries they had dreamt of visiting. Surely, all partner organizations are looking for their own benefits. The host university is keen to benefit from Chinese language classes for students while it seeks to earn China prestige through co-operation with China and Chinese universities. The Chinese partner university is no doubt keen to strengthen its internationalization and research capacity, while it serves the goals of the Chinese government (and Hanban). However, for the host university, enhancing the prestige of the Chinese partner university is a double-edged sword. Surely, the Confucius Institute benefits the academic credibility and international reputation of the host university, but one may ask how the Chinese university, even a prestigious one, founded by the CCP and known as the cradle of Chinese government officials, benefits the host university.

The outcome of the 7S Framework analysis shows how the performance of the institute is interrelated with each factor and how they impact on the daily operations of the institute. It also confirms why it is hard to set objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based. The analysis proposes several varieties of conflict within an organization. The partners have conflicts of interest with one another, the management has power struggles and, in the absence of trust and co-operation, people are in conflict with each other. The rational view of organizations is largely that they carry out specific tasks that require

the co-operation of members to define objectives, assign responsibilities and execute plans (Manzini, 1988). Management-orientated organization theory is seen as being concerned with identifying and implementing the most efficient *means* for instrumentally achieving *given ends*. The problem of how organizations should assess their performance is challenging. The McKinsey 7s Framework model was developed by the McKinsey consultants Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (1982). Since its introduction, the model has been widely used by academics and practitioners and remains one of the tools encouraging thinking beyond the commonly accepted key variables of strategy and structure, as it puts emphasis on human resources such as “the soft S’s of style, skills, staff, and shared goals” (Watson, 1983). The strength of the 7S Framework is that with a simple model one can gather a lot of information while it makes to reflect the linkage of the strategy, objectives and performance of the organization. But the model has its limitations and constraints, as the reality is much more complex. Therefore, recent studies, for example that of Alvesson and Willmott (2003), have broadened the picture to consider how cultural–ideological control operates in relationship to all employees, including levels of management. Critical theory, more interpretative than the management-orientated approach, challenges toward reflexive approaches to explore the deeper issues of organizational life. It calls for a critical consciousness in order to explore the forces that have caused the situation. Although Foucault has been criticized for under-estimating the importance of state or government power, he has been influential in the development of research in areas such as workplace surveillance. Foucault’s work *Discipline and Punish* (1977) presents punishment as a technique for the exercise of power. Discipline is a mechanism of power, a way in which power can be exercised. It regulates the behaviour of individuals in the organization while it is enforced with the aid of complex systems of surveillance. His conception of power as an invisible structure of control through manipulation, fear, insecurity, misunderstanding and other means is also pursued in the institute, over the Chinese staff and the surrounding formal organization. Disciplinary power embedded in the hierarchy and status culminating in punishment or the threat of it has long been a part of Chinese reality and yet it seems to be most potent and efficient when it operates through administrative rules.

One of core elements of post-modernism is that there is no such thing as pure knowledge and therefore we must recognize that there are many different views of any situation and that we should attempt to find out different perspectives. Boje (1995) uses Tamara as a metaphor for organization,

showing that although managers may sit together in a meeting, their interpretations and perspectives may be very different as a result of their previous interactions and experiences. Each of us can gain only a partial, context-specific view of any particular situation. Thus, Tamara cannot be understood in one visit: two people can be in the same room and each can walk away from the same conversation with entirely different stories (McAuley, Duberley, & Johnson, 2007).

Nevertheless, here is one of the stories. Misunderstandings, disputes and all kind of troubles started right at the beginning when the first Chinese director was “dispatched” to the institute to “help” the local director in planning and implementing the Chinese language and culture programme at the institute. Then a new director appointed by the university was designated to implement a more research-orientated approach in the institute according to the university’s guidelines. This turned out not to be an appropriate approach in the view of the Chinese director, or later of the new acting Chinese director. Conflicts and disputes increased and particularly arguments over “the rules” between the Chinese director and other personnel heated the atmosphere. This culminated in serious threats of punishment to a young volunteer teacher, from the Chinese acting director. The Finnish director mediated the situation with the Chinese partner leaders so that at the end there were no consequences for the teacher. The working relationship between the two directors soured. One way this showed was the conflict of authority, as the acting Chinese director insisted on being treated “equally” as she represents “her” prestigious university, which is known as a mouthpiece of the party. As this became a constraint on the development of the institute, the local director, fully supported by the board members of the university, asked that the acting Chinese director be moved to another institute elsewhere. This resulted in the acting Chinese director being “promoted” to Chinese director by the Chinese partner university. This was quietly “accepted” by Hanban, the other party in the contract. The leadership of the Finnish university was very cautious to preserve the reputation of the Chinese partner. Meanwhile big organizational changes were going on in the host university and the Chinese embassy purposely held “meetings” with the university leadership in the absence of the institute’s director(s). The Chinese embassy and Chinese partner organizations advised the staff to work in “harmony”. Hence, the problems were played down, with no real attempt to make a change.

The above demonstrates the other outcome — how politics impacts on the institute. The organizational aspects in the institute, as demonstrated through the output of the 7S Framework model, showed that the absence of shared values resulted in weaknesses in the system, style, staff and skills and caused all kind of problems affecting the work there, whereas the critical theory and post-modern approaches reflect more hidden reasons behind those of the 7S Framework analysis. This led to acknowledging the role of politics as well as China's cultural-ideological power, which have an enormous impact on the institute, its operations, people and overall development.

Indeed, the Confucius Institutes established by the Chinese government are part of China's soft power aimed to support China's image and win hearts and minds, to build partnerships and multilateral co-operation globally. Whereas the foreign partners — schools, universities or other entities — consider that by promoting Chinese language and traditional culture they can benefit from the “China prestige”, while China's cultural agenda paved by diplomacy serves the goals of the government, to foster economic relations with the mighty China, which is considered of utmost importance. Thus, it is quite clear that all partners are keen to secure the status quo, to accept the situation as unchangeable, and therefore in a sense they are trapped by seeing things such as poor communication and heated relationships as due to cultural constraints.

Conclusion

China's desire for international respect as a great power comes from its defeat in modern history, subordination to Japan and humiliation by Western powers (Huntington, 1996, p. 229). In consequence, the Chinese government cultivates an image of China that holds up “China as a unique power, with its super territory, super population, and super culture over millennia of history”, as articulated by Professor Zhang Weiwei from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences in his keynote speech at the In-Service Training Workshop for Confucius Institute Directors in October 2013. The Chinese government pays a great deal of attention to strengthening its soft power, to improve its global image by offering Confucianism and a “harmonious world” as an alternative approach to Western philosophy and hegemony. Thus, along with diplomacy and economic ties, Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture have become an

important element of China's foreign policy and soft power, stressing cultural values and harmony (Paradise, 2009). Does the return to classical learning and Confucian ethics offer a key to the Chinese government to realizing the modern "Chinese Dream" (Bapna et al., 2013)? Confucius' political beliefs were rooted in his belief that a good ruler would be self-disciplined and would govern his subjects by his own example. Confucius said, "he who governs by means of his virtues is like the pole-star: it remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it" (*Lunyu*, 2.1). Freedom, equality, fraternity, human rights, and the rule of law are all universal values and so are the "all-encompassing" Confucian virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and good faith (Huang & Chen, 2014). The thing is that the Chinese political system is not in harmony with universal values.

The Chinese government has allocated substantial resources to build Confucius Institutes all over the world to serve diplomacy, expand cultural exchange and increase international communication. The government's aim is to increase the number of the Confucius Institutes to 500 by the end of 2014. The positive result is that Chinese language learners and cultural exchanges have increased considerably, facilitating communication with and understanding of China. But the analysis of the case study institute showed that there are diverse challenges in the Confucius Institutes, while their impact on academic freedom is cause for concern, as discussed earlier. One may ask whether the Confucius Institutes hosted by universities is in fact a good idea.

To what extent can the politically driven Confucianism and Confucius Institutes augment China's soft power to construct a new world order to counterbalance the "self-centred value system of the West" (Wang & Lu, 2008)? Confucianism with its references to Chinese sages is interpreted and used by the Party while the Confucius Institutes carry Chinese culture programmes to gain minds and hearts. However, it seems that these are not as powerful soft power ingredients as those sought by the Chinese Communist Party, because Confucianism and culture are in essence about intellectual dialogue and exchange of ideas, rather than designated tools to support domestic goals for maintaining Party power and its legitimacy. As pointed out by Ding and Saunders (2006, p. 21), a true cultural revival is dependent on the political environment in China. Neither Confucianism nor Confucius Institutes as such support the soft power goals of foreign policy. Nye (1990, 2004) famously said, "soft power is a dance that requires partners". And as He Wenping, a senior fellow at the

Chinese Academy of Social Science, says: “The great and profound Chinese culture provides great potential for China to carry out public diplomacy. In the final analysis, we are not short of public diplomacy and soft power resources, but we have lacked the awareness and means to promote [them]” (Bapna et al., 2013, p. 191).

In sum, the key question is how China's soft power is actually perceived in the world. One may say that in aiming to build friendship and partnerships and to help enhance global stability, the key is how to use soft power resources and behaviour, and how attractive these are to others.

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